

epiTRENDS

A Monthly Bulletin on Epidemiology and Public Health Practice in Washington State

Salmonellosis Contracted Through Animals

Cuddly, cute, furry animals such as baby chicks or hamsters may be appealing as pets for families, but these animals have been associated with recent salmonellosis infections among children.

This spring (2005), health and agriculture officials in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and California have been investigating a multistate outbreak of salmonellosis related to contact with baby chicks. Between February 28 and May 15, health agencies received reports of 17 people with gastroenteritis who were infected with *Salmonella* Ohio. Of those 17, at least 12 recalled handling or being in close proximity to baby chicks in the week before onset; children accounted for most of the cases. This is the fifth consecutive year that clusters of illness due *Salmonella* have been detected in Pacific Northwest residents who handled chicks, which are sold seasonally in feed stores or by mail.

Also this spring, a separate investigation identified 10 cases of salmonellosis due to *Salmonella* Montevideo in Colorado and other western states. Of eight persons interviewed, seven had exposure to baby chicks, ducklings, young turkeys, or young geese, and again, most of the infections occurred in children.

Other Animal Carriers

A newly recognized source of salmonellosis is small rodent pets such as hamsters, mice, and rats. A recent *MMWR* report described 28 cases of salmonellosis that were contracted after contact with rodent pets. Children were disproportionately affected. ("Outbreak of Multidrug-Resistant *Salmonella* Typhimurium Associated with Rodents Purchased at Retail Pet Stores; United States, December 2003–October 2004"; <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5417a3.htm>)

Reptiles such as turtles, iguanas, and snakes have repeatedly been associated with transmission of salmonellosis to people. As iguanas became popular pets in the 1990s, human salmonellosis infections surged. Three decades ago, baby turtles were banned from sale as pets nationwide to reduce the incidence of reptile-associated salmonellosis; however, sale of baby turtles has recently surged again. Reptiles are asymptomatic carriers of *Salmonella*, and cannot be cleared of the infection.

Symptoms of Infection and Prevention

Salmonellosis is a bacterial infection that can cause severe diarrhea, fever, chills, and abdominal discomfort. Complications can include abscesses, bloodstream infections, septic arthritis, or meningitis. Children, the elderly, and those with weakened immune systems are at particular risk because they are most likely to become seriously ill if infected with *Salmonella*. People are most often infected by eating food or drinking water contaminated with *Salmonella* or by contact with infected people, animals, or the environment of infected animals.

Continued page 2

Vol. 10 No. 5



epiTRENDS
P.O. Box 47812
Olympia, WA 98504-7812

Mary C. Selecky
Secretary
Maxine Hayes, MD, MPH
State Health Officer
Jo Hofmann, MD
State Epidemiologist for
Communicable Diseases
Sandra L. Marvinney, BA
Managing Editor
Marcia J. Goldoft, MD, MPH
Scientific Editor

Pets are important parts of our lives and people are enriched by human-animal contact and companionship. While reptiles and chicks are not appropriate pets for very young children, in general the risks of salmonellosis and other diseases from animals can be minimized. People should avoid handling animals that are ill with diarrhea. Parents should choose pets carefully and supervise children when they are near animals. The most effective disease prevention is easy: always wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after touching pets or farm animals.

***epi*TRENDS Monthly Posting Alert**

To receive monthly e-mail notification of *epi*TRENDS, please register at this website. Choose the option to join the listserve. Enter your name and email address.

<http://listserv.wa.gov/archives/epitrends.html>

For More Information

Washington State Department of Health

(<http://www.doh.wa.gov/>)

Salmonellosis from chicks and ducklings:

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/salmonellachick.html>

Contact information for your local health department:

(<http://www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm>)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Pocket pets and salmonellosis:

http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/animals/pocket_pets.htm

Salmonellosis from animals:

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/diseases/salmonellosis.htm>

Diseases from reptiles:

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/animals/reptiles.htm>

Salmonellosis and pocket pets:

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5417a3.htm>

Salmonellosis and chicks, 1999:

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm4914a1.htm>

Salmonellosis and chicks in Washington, 1995–1996:

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00046940.htm>

Salmonellosis and turtles:

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5409a3.htm>

Animals in public places compendium:

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5404a1.htm>

Lymphocytic choriomeningitis virus

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm54d526a1.htm>